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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3422  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5635  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0010  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3878  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001138

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN,

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EPET](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: KISS FROM A ROGUE

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) On September 6, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived in Ashgabat for his first visit to Turkmenistan, which has the world's fourth largest reserves of natural gas. The short (less than 24-hour) visit, included a welcoming ceremony, an official meeting with President Berdimuhamedov, and a visit to a horse farm. According to press reports, Chavez urged that Turkmenistan join a gas cartel that would be similar to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), an idea originally proposed by Russia and Qatar. They also discussed Turkmenistan's goals for increasing the volume of energy production as well as increasing the capacity of refining. In order to achieve these goals, press reports stated, Turkmenistan would need to attract additional investment and introduce the use of advanced technology and equipment. However, Turkmenistan could draw on the experience of Venezuela in this regard. The two sides also discussed chemical, food, textile, and agricultural cooperation and the establishment of cultural, scientific, and educational contacts.

13. (U) President Berdimuhamedov said Chavez' visit was an historic milestone in developing and strengthening bilateral relations. National TV channel Altyn Asyr stated "Turkmenistan and Venezuela intend to establish relations of civilized inter-state cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral, especially within the large international organizations, and solely on the principles of sound pragmatism, trust and mutual benefit. These countries strictly follow the principles of non-interference in each other's internal affairs and respect the choice of their own path of development." Chavez invited Berdimuhamedov to pay an official visit to Venezuela.

14. (SBU) Per usual for these ceremonies in Turkmenistan, Chavez greeted representatives of the diplomatic corps during the official welcoming ceremony. He worked his way down the line, shaking hands and offering comments. When he got to the Charge, she introduced herself as being from the U.S. Embassy. Chavez then proceeded to gush, while chatting with Charge for several minutes. He said how much he liked President Obama. He also noted how happy he was to see a person of color "just like President Obama." Chavez said he really hoped relations between our two nations would improve. He asked Charge where she learned Spanish and then expressed

great approval when she said Puerto Rico. Finally, before taking his leave and asking her to send his regards to President Obama, he planted a big kiss on her cheek.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The Turkmen are proudly neutral. They are not joiners. They are happy to work under the UN umbrella, but avoid most other entanglements like the plague. The odds of this country signing on to an OPEC-like gas cartel are practically non-existent. Venezuela is very, very far away from Central Asia. Trade/commercial ties are negligible. And given Turkmenistan's neutrality, they would never have any interest in getting caught up in political drama. Nevertheless, President Berdimuhamedov no doubt was happy to have a world famous leader visit and provide further evidence of Turkmenistan's many and varied partners. END COMMENT.  
CURRAN